

Fundamentally Wrong

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Summary: The moments after he detonates the bomb are wrong and threaten to shatter his reality because she is not with him. Not the way she should be. (spoilers for Halo 4)

Fundamentally Wrong

_A/N: First of all, I've never played the game. any of them. But I _did _take the time to watch all cutscenes from every game, because my siblings were playing the game and I wanted to understand the story._

And then Cortana happened.

_Blasted feels. I hope I've done the moment justice-there's probably a few details I missed, but I rewatched the scene and tried to make it accurate. I'd also like to give props to the animators for somehow communicating Master Chief's emotion when he _doesn't even have a face, _and I wrote part of this while listening to Into Eternity (Dark World soundtrack) and I'd kind of like to die now._

* * *

><p>This is the moment where he wins, he thinks.</p>

Because this is the moment where it looks most hopeless. Where he doesn't have a prayer of succeeding. Where he is slowly being choked to death and it looks like he is losing.

(this is the moment where Cortana steps in. All of them.)

And here he is.

These are the moments he was born and bred for. These are the moments which make him.

This is where he is a soldier, and he will save Earth and humanity.

He does not falter, he does not hesitate, he does not second-guess, he is not afraid.

He detonates the bomb.

For a moment, a brief moment, he almost experiences something like fear, but it is simply the black darkness of 'almost dead again'. He cricks his neck, almost smiling, waiting for Cortana's gentle blue light to wash the dark away.

Why is he waiting?

"Cortana," he says, looking up. Something is wrong. Something is _fundamentally _wrong.

He stands. It looks likeâ€|computer codeâ€|

There is something wrong with reality.

"Cortana, do you read?"

Where is she?

Why isn't she answering?

This is _wrong._

"Cortana, come in," he says, and he hears the tiny note of command in his voice.

No, not commandâ€|desperation.

What is this place? Where is she?

Finally, _finally, _he senses her.

Behind him.

_This is wrong, _his subconscious screams.

He turns, slowly.

And for a moment, just a half second of brain activity, all is right with the world, because she is there.

But then he catches up with his own thoughts, and realizes that _she _is _there._

Not _here._

How is it even possible?

(he thinks he knows)

His brain stops trying to figure out how and just watches Cortana walk toward him. It is a sight he hadn't known he wanted to see, and again for a moment all is right, and again he catches up to

reality.

"Howâ€œ" he says brokenly, confused.

(his mind is screaming because something is desperately wrong and he thinks he knows what it is)

"Oh, _I'm _the strangest thing you've seen all day?" she teases him, like everything is normal.

It can't be, when her voice is higher than normal, and it shakes.

He remembers something. "But if we're here—" he starts, trying to figure out what is catching his attention about this fact.

"It worked," she interrupts him. "You did it. Just like you always do."

She sounds tooâ€œ|

Too something he doesn't want to define.

Ever.

So he looks around. "So how do we get out of here?" he says, dragging the conversation to where it needs to beâ€œforwardâ€œrather than dwelling on the past.

She doesn't answer immediately, not with a quip or anything, and he looks back to see her head hanging in what could only be called resignation. "I'm not coming with you this time," she says softly.

"What?" he asksâ€œdemands.

_Reality is wrong, _his mind shouts.

"Most of me is down there," she says, looking down as she does. He does not look away from her face, her face which is more real than it has ever been, do you hear that? More real. More solid. More here. More _with him._

"I only held enough back to get you off the ship."

Something is fundamentally wrong with the universe, and it sounds like Cortana tearfully telling him that she is not coming with him. This is _not right. _This is _not _the way the universe runs.

"No," he says flatly. "That's notâ€œwe go together," he says firmly. There is no room for anything else, any other 'option' that is not MasterChiefandCortana. This is the way it is, and she is coming with him.

"It's already done," she says, eyes bright and voice gentle, even as it rips apart his world piece by piece.

He struggles to keep it together, to hold it with the sheer force of his will.

"I am _not _leaving you here," he says, since she seems to have

forgotten that this is a fact of the universe.

"John," she whisper-sighs, and moves forward and places one hand against his chest, and gasps at the contact. "I've waited so long to do that."

He's a soldier. He's seen goodbyes.

This cannot be a goodbye.

It can't. Not whenâ€¦not when he is the soldier everyone looks up to, the one who always wins, and he always wins becauseâ€"

"It was my job to take care of you."

_Not was, _his mind shrieks. _Is, is, isâ€"_

"We were supposed to take care of each other," Cortana says softly, breaking into his thoughts, and she is closer and he looks at her in surprise. He notices that she looks closer to tears than an AI has any right to and he tries to listen, because this looks important, this looksâ€" "And we did," she says, and her voice is choked with emotion and it threatens to undo him.

He can't take this.

He can _not _take anything else trying to destroy his world, his reality.

"Cortana, please," he says, and he knows he is begging when he hears his own voice and cannot say anything else and has to turn his head away because he knows he will cry if he says anything else.

He, Master Chief, Demon, winner, soldierâ€"

His world is breaking.

(his heart is breaking)

Cortana gives a silent sigh and caresses his chest plateâ€"one last timeâ€" _and begins to walk away.

This is wrong, this cannot be happening, and if it isâ€"

If it isâ€"

All the things he's left unsaid threaten to drown him, but he can't do anything other than stare at her.

He watches her, and he knows that if she had been human she would have been crying, and that when her mouth opens a sound like a broken heart would have come from it.

"Wait," he says. He can't justâ€¦he can't just let her walk away. _She_ can't walk away. She is his guide, his conscience, his helper, his friendâ€"

His home.

She looks at him, and he wonders if she can read his mind because she

says in a horribly choked voice, "Welcome _home, _John."

No.

She fades away.

No.

She's wrong, this isn't home, this can't be home, not if she isn't thereâ€"

She's wrong, and all of this is wrong, because she is not here.

She won't be here.

No.

No.

Reality is undone, immutable facts have been changed, and _she is not with him._

His world is _shaken._

He stares at the last place she had been, and he does not notice that the world is physically collapsing around him until the ground shakes enough to forcibly direct his eyes elsewhere. He finally notices the destruction around him, and he thinks it fitting, the one right thing in all this _wrong._

It looks like I feel, he thinks absently as everything breaks apart.

Shattered.

Destroyed when a law of nature changed when it should not have.

There is a flash, and then darkness.

And for the briefest moment of instinctual thought, he waits for Cortana's blue to light the way.

Then he remembers.

End
file.